



THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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Renowned Yale professor illuminates the importance of icons in the spiritual life of the monks at St. Catherine's Monastery, Mt. Sinai at The Cleveland Museum of Art

*Annual John and Helen Collis Lecture Series hosting nationally and internationally recognized experts
in the field of ancient Greek and Byzantine art*

CLEVELAND (August 16, 2007) — The Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) presents the annual *John and Helen Collis Lecture* featuring Dr. Robert S. Nelson, Robert Lehman Professor of the History of Art, Yale University. The lecture entitled, *The Light of Icons at St. Catherine's Monastery, Mt. Sinai, Egypt* will be held at **2 p.m. on Sunday, September 30 in Gallery 101 of the Museum.**

The Light of Icons at St. Catherine's Monastery, Mt. Sinai, Egypt will introduce the audience to the physical environment in which the monastery is located, the Sinai desert, the monastery itself and to the life of the monks there in its sixth-century church. The lecture will be illustrated with Dr. Nelson's photos of the monastery and the monks and accompanied by his commentary.

"My goal is to put the audience in the Sinai and to try to help them see and feel what the church and the monks are like," said Dr. Robert S. Nelson. "The church and the liturgy are the center of the lives of the monks and icons are at the center of the center."

Professor Nelson is a leading authority on Byzantine art and architecture and the author of numerous publications. His latest work, *Hagia Sophia, 1850-1950*, asks how the famous cathedral of Constantinople came to be regarded as one of the great monuments of world architecture. He recently curated an important exhibition of Byzantine icons from the monastery of Saint Catherine on Mt. Sinai titled *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground* for the Paul J. Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

"Icons are experienced in different kinds of light: the natural light of the day and artificial light at night," Dr. Nelson explains. "In the dark, candles and oil lamps are the only illumination and this is controlled by the monks. They light and extinguish candles in coordination with the liturgy. The result is similar to our theatre, but this drama was put together centuries before modern theatre lighting. Icons are meant primarily to be seen by candlelight. The gold ground of icons functions with candle light and creates dazzling effects to promote religious messages."

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Free, required tickets for the lecture are available by contacting the Museum's Ticket Center at 1-888-CMA-0033 or www.ClevelandArt.org. Limited reserved and general seating are on a first come, first serve basis. CMA's parking garage is closed for renovation. Limited free parking is available the Cleveland Botanical Garden. Limited valet service will also be provided. To obtain a free parking pass contact Shannon Masterson at 216-707-2477 or smasterson@clevelandart.org. Seating for the lecture will begin at 1 p.m.

This year's John and Helen Collis Lecture, *The Light of Icons at St. Catherine's Monastery, Mt. Sinai, Egypt* is made possible through the John and Helen Collis Family Endowment. The annual John and Helen Collis Lecture alternates between Ancient Greek and Byzantine Art and brings nationally and internationally recognized experts in the field of art history and archeology to the CMA to discuss new trends in scholarship, archaeological excavations and museum exhibitions.

"We're very proud to have been able to make this contribution to The Cleveland Museum of Art," says Dr. John Collis. "After the *Magna Graecia* exhibition, our family wanted to continue fostering an understanding of Hellenic culture, both ancient and Byzantine, by making these lectures available to everyone," adds Dr. Collis' wife, Helen.

The endowment is the first of its kind at the Museum establishing an annual lecture with a particular art historical emphasis. Dr. John and Helen Collis are members of The Hellenic Preservation Society of Northeastern Ohio. Mrs. Collis is a founding member and Dr. Collis is on the advisory board for this non-profit organization established to present a unified voice of the Hellenes in Northeastern Ohio to preserve and perpetuate the Hellenic legacy that will promote the Greek experience through education, collection and preservation.

Additional support came from the Hellenic Preservation Society of Northeast Ohio. The Ohio Arts Council helped fund this program with state tax dollars to encourage growth, educational excellence and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans.

The Cleveland Museum of Art is one of America's leading comprehensive museums. Its permanent collection is world renowned for its quality and breadth, spanning 6,000 years. The museum is a significant international forum for exhibitions, scholarship and art acquisitions. For more information on the museum, its holdings, programs, services and events, call 1-888-CMA-0033 or visit www.ClevelandArt.org.

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